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SAN MANUEL CELEBRATES OPENING OF TRIBAL COURT

First Formal Court System Established on Tribal Reservation

San Manuel Indian Reservation (Highland, Calif.) – October 23, 2009 - The San Manuel Band of Serrano Mission Indians commemorated the opening of the new San Manuel Tribal Court today. The grand opening event marked an important milestone in the Tribe's exercise of its sovereign authorities as a government and was attended by 100 guests from regional tribal and state courts, law enforcement, and public office.

“This is a historic day for the Tribe as we constitute the first formal court system on the reservation,” said Chairman James Ramos. “Today we affirm our commitment to invest in the capacity of our government to serve its people.”

The court is comprised of a Trial Court and an Appellate Court, and the event included the first public swearing-in ceremony of the Chief Judge and the swearing-in of three Appellate Judges and a Judge Pro Tem.

San Manuel's trial court will include Chief Judge Joanne Willis Newton and Judge Pro Tem Anthony Lee. Judge Willis Newton is a member of the Cree Nation of Chisasibi, located in northern Quebec, Canada, and worked for several years in the field of Aboriginal law in Canada before starting to practice Indian law in California more than ten years ago. Judge Lee is a member of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe of New York and is the tribal attorney for the White Mountain Apache tribe of Arizona. He also sits as an appellate judge for the Southwest Intertribal Court of Appeals.

San Manuel's appellate court judges are: Michael Taylor, Jonodev Chauduri, Deborah DuBray and Job Serebrov. All of the Tribal Court's judges have significant experience in the fields of federal Indian law and tribal law and are licensed to practice in various jurisdictions across the country and Canada.

“It is a great honor to be a part of this event and the Tribe's development as a government,” said Chief Judge Willis Newton. “I look forward to the opportunity to serve the San Manuel community and to working with such an accomplished team of colleagues.”

The Court provides an important dispute resolution forum for tribal citizens and other persons who come within the Tribe's jurisdiction. The court exercises general civil jurisdiction over tribal citizens and persons who have consented to tribal jurisdiction, either expressly or implicitly by entering the San Manuel Reservation or engaging in contractual relations with the Tribe.

About the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians

The San Manuel Band of Serrano Mission Indians is a federally recognized American Indian tribe located near the city of Highland, Calif. The Serrano Indians are the indigenous people of the San Bernardino highlands, passes, valleys and mountains who share a common language and culture. The San Manuel reservation was established in 1891 and recognized as sovereign nation with the right of self-government. Since time immemorial, the San Manuel tribal community has endured change and hardship. Amidst these challenges the tribe continued to maintain its unique form of governance. Like other governments it seeks to provide a better quality of life for its citizens by building infrastructure, maintaining civil services and promoting social, economic and cultural development. Today San Manuel tribal government oversees many governmental units including the departments of fire, public safety, education and environment.

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